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Transcript of President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters

WASHINGTON, May 4 — Following is a White House transcript of President Reagan's interview today by George Condon of Copley News Service, Bruce Drake of The New York Daily News, Sara Fritz of U.S. News & World Report, Carl Leubsdorf of The Dallas Morning News, Chris Wallace of NBC News and Steven R. Weisman of The New York Times:

Action Against Nicaragua

Q. Mr. President, moving on to another topic, before this session began, you asked why you should not be scolding members of the House committee that voted yesterday to stop funding for covert operations against Nicaragua. Do you really see any consequences of that action? Does that vote stop you from doing anything, or hinder anything your Administration is doing?

A. It is in a committee. And there is the Senate yet to go on this. And I would hope that, maybe, we could do better there.

It, also, had an element in it that looked at partisanship, since the vote was on straight party lines. And I do not believe that that reflects the thinking of a great many Democrats, because many of them spoke up right after my speech.

Nicaraguan Hypocrisy

Q. Does this vote indicate that you failed in your objectives in that speech?

A. No, as I say, because I know that there are still a great many Democrats who have been quite outspoken, including some of the leadership in the House of their party, in support of what I had proposed — of making this a bipartisan approach, and even being critical of some of their members who did seem to sound partisan.

The thing that needs telling about this whole situation in Nicaragua — I thought I had covered this subject but, maybe, I did not cover it enough the other night. And that is that, right now, these forces that have risen up in opposition to the Sandinista Government are — under what you might say is a sort of a group — a controlling body that formed in the northern part of Nicaragua. There are about seven leading members to this kind of committee. Most of them were former anti-Somoza people. They are people who simply want this Government of Nicaragua to keep its promises.

If you remember, the Organization of American States asked Somoza to resign at that time. And Somoza, his

reply to them was that if it would benefit his country, Nicaragua, he would. And he did resign.

The Organization of American States also gave four points to the Sandinistas that they, the Organization of American States, would support them if their goal was these four things: of promoting democracy, of immediate elections, of a concern for human rights, and the Sandinistas acceded to that and said yes, those were their goals and they would keep those four provisions or promises. And they haven't. They never made an effort to keep them. They violated all of them.

Now, this is what makes me say that there's a great hypocrisy there of the Sandinista Government protesting what is happening in its own country and from people who were once a part of its own revolution at the same time that they are supporting people in another country who are seeking to overthrow a duly elected government of the people.

Export of Revolution

Q. Mr. President, you — in referring to these groups, you seem to suggest that these groups are seeking a change in Nicaragua itself. And how does that statement square with your saying that we're not violating the law in aiding groups who seek the overthrow of the Nicaraguan Government?

A. Well, do they? Or are they asking that Government — or that revolution of which they themselves were part — asking it to go back to its revolutionary promises and keep faith with the revolution that the people of Nicaragua supported.

Many of these people are businessmen whose businesses have been taken over. They are farmers whose land was seized by this Government, farmers whose crops were — they were forced to sell them to the Government at less than the cost of production. And they're protesting this violation of what had made them support the revolution to begin with.

But the whole purpose of the Sandinista Government seems to be not only with El Salvador but the export of revolution to their other neighbors, to countries that are already democracies. Honduras has taken that step;

Costa Rica, the oldest democracy of all. And all of them are plagued by radicals in their midst who are encouraged by the Sandinista Government.

Effect of a Cutoff

Q. Mr. President, I'd like to go back to what the committee actually did yesterday in voting the cutoff. C.I.A. Director Casey is reported to have said it would lead to a bloodbath for the guerrillas inside the country. Do you agree with that? And how seriously do you take what the committee does? How bad would it be if that cutoff of covert aid went through?

A. Well, I'm saying if — well, if that became the policy, I think it would set a very dangerous precedent. The executive branch of Government and the Congress have a shared responsibility, as I pointed out in my speech, for foreign policy. And we have — we each have a place in formulating foreign policy, but we each have a responsibility also. And I think that what I said about this was that it was very irresponsible. And it was — it literally was taking away the ability of the executive branch to carry out its constitutional responsibilities.

Q. Do you believe that it would lead to the bloodbath that the C.I.A. Director talked about?

A. Well, I haven't heard his entire remark in connection with that term or how he described it or what he meant with it. I'll make it a point to find out. I once used a "bloodbath" term as Governor of California, and one individual reversed it in the press and had it saying the opposite of what I had intended it to say and I never did quite get the situation cleared up.

Method Held Ineffective

Q. Well, what — I don't understand. What's wrong with the committee's position? What difference does it make if instead of giving covert aid to the guerrillas in Nicaragua, you give overt aid to the countries of El Salvador and Honduras to stop the flow of weapons through their countries, which is what you say you want in the first place? What's wrong with that?

A. Except then the only help that you can give is through other governments. And I don't think that — I don't think that's an effective thing to do, and how do you know that the other governments would want to themselves, then, participate in helping the people that need the help? In other words, we'd be asking some other government to do what our own — what our Congressional, or our Congress, has said that we can't do.

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